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THE SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITY.

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AN OVERVIEW OF A SERIES OF STUDIES ON BYSTANDER INTERVENTION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS IS PRESENTED. IN THE FIRST EXPERIMENT, TWO, THREE, AND SIX MEMBER GROUPS REACTED TO HEARING, BUT NOT SEEING, ONE MEMBER OF THE GROUP HAVING AN EPILEPTIC SEIZURE. AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF OBSERVERS PERCEIVED TO BE PRESENT DECREASED THE SPEED OF RESPONSE. WHEN VARYING THE TYPE OF OTHERS PRESENT, IT WAS FOUND THAT NEITHER SEX NOR PREVIOUS MEDICAL EXPERIENCE CAUSED ANY CHANGES IN REACTION SPEED. IN ANOTHER EXPERIMENT, A QUESTION WAS DIRECTLY ASKED OF--(1) THE BYSTANDER, (2) THE BYSTANDER AND ANOTHER PERSON, OR (3) THE OTHER PERSON, WHO IN ALL CASES RESPONDED BY MISINFORMING THE QUESTIONER. IT WAS CONCLUDED THAT WHEN DIRECT INTERVENTION IS NEEDED, VARIATIONS IN THE SITUATIONS DETERMINE THE DEGREE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERVENTION. IN OTHER STUDIES, IT WAS FOUND THAT WHEN TWO SUBJECTS KNOW EACH OTHER, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND QUICKLY IN THE SEIZURE EXPERIMENT, AND THAT PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE VICTIM, FOR EVEN ONE MINUTE ENCOUNTER, INCREASED RESPONSE SPEED SIGNIFICANTLY. RESULTS ARE USED TO EXPLAIN THE FAILURE OF BYSTANDERS TO HELP IN EMERGENCIES IN LARGE CITIES. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION CONVENTION, WASHINGTON, D.C., SEPTEMBER 4, 1967. (PR)

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The Sharing of Responsibility

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The experiments reported here were conducted and in considerable part designed by Harvey Allen and Susan Darley. The research was supported in part by National Science Foundation grant GS 1238.

This paper is designed to give an overview of several studies that have been or will be reported in more detail--and precision--elsewhere. Therefore, please do not quote this paper.

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John M. Darley
APA, 1967
Washington, D. D.

The Sharing of Responsibility

Recently I have been engaged in a series of studies of bystander interventions in emergency situations. Today I want to report to you the results of several laboratory and field experiments that Bidd Latané and I did that demonstrate various circumstances that cause a bystander to feel a sharing of his responsibility to help the victim of the emergency.

Previously, we reported a study in which the number of people perceived to be witnessing an emergency had a significant effect on the speed and likelihood with which an individual bystander initiated helping action. Let me review the design and results of that experiment here since the other research I report develops from it: A person - the usual college sophomore - comes to participate in a group discussion situation about urban college environments. She - most of the subjects were females - is given plausible reasons why the discussion will be held over an intercommunication network rather than face-to-face. During the course of the discussion, one member began to have a fit, or seizure of the epileptic sort. The dependent variable is the speed with which the subject leaves her room to initiate whatever helping action she is going to take. It is impossible for her to discuss the emergency with other participants since the fit preempts the communication channel, and the noise of the fit also prevents the subject discovering how the other participants are reacting.

In these circumstances, a variation in the number of other bystanders who were perceived to be hearing the emergency affects the speed

and likelihood with which the single observer reacts to the emergency. Of the subjects who perceived themselves to be alone with the victim 85% reported the emergency before it concluded, only about 50% of those who believed there to be four other bystanders also present reacted before the end of the fit.

The group size - speed of report relationship is shown graphically in figure 1. Three experimental conditions were run, of perceived size of two, three and six persons; that is, the subject perceived herself to be alone with the victim, with one other bystander and the victim, or in the six person group, with four other bystanders and the victim. The points plotted are the average speed of report for each condition, based on 13 subjects per condition. A one-way analysis of variance reaches significance at the .01 level. A test for linear trend gives a correlation coefficient of .32. Therefore, we concluded that an increase in the number of observers perceived to be present does cause a decrease in the speed with which a single observer responds to the emergency.

Our explanation of this result involves the notion of the diffusion of responsibility for coping with the emergency:

When only one bystander is present in an emergency any help that is to come must be from him. Although he may choose to ignore them out of concern of his own personal safety or desires not to get involved, any situational pressures to intervene focus uniquely on him. When there are several observers present, however, pressures to intervene do not focus on any one of the observers. Instead the responsibility for intervention is shared between all the onlookers

and does not uniquely devolve on any one. In this situation if can be expected that any tendencies a person has to avoid intervention can easily be rationalized. This is what we mean by diffusion of responsibility caused by the presence other persons.

Closely related to the diffusion of responsibility among several bystanders is the diffusion of potential blame for failure to report the emergency. However much we may wish to think that an individual's moral behavior is divorced from considerations of personal punishment or reward, there is both theory and evidence to the contrary. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that under conditions of <u>group</u> responsibility for a punishable act, the punishment or blame that accrues to any one individual is often slight or non-existant. Insofar as considerations of potential blame for non-intervention motivate intervention in emergency situations, the presence of other bystanders will decrease pressures to intervene.

Encouraged by the correlation between the size of the group and the speed with which individuals report an emergency we went on to make other variations in the experimental situation. We reasoned that another way of varying the degree of responsibility felt by any individual to take action in an emergency would be to vary the <u>kind</u> of other people that were present. This variation corresponds to the common sense observation the one feels less responsible to deal with certain emergencies if a policeman is also an observer. Since we could not see any plausible way of introducing a policeman to our emergency situation we decided instead to vary the sex of various observers in the three persons group. We chose the three person

group since we felt that variation of a single other observer would have the greatest impact in this experimental situation, in which he was the only other observer present. In one set of conditions the real subject (who was a female) thought that the other bystander was a female, or a male, or a premedical student who worked in the emergency ward at Bellevue Hospital. In a fourth variation, male college sophomores were the experimental subjects.

Since coping with emergencies is often thought to be the duty of males in our culture, we expected that the female subject would be less likely to report the emergency when the other bystander was a male than when she was a female. Also, we expected that male subjects would react more quickly than female subjects. Finally, we expected that female subjects would certainly leave coping with the emergency to the other bystander when he was both a male, a pre-medical student, and experienced in dealing with emergencies.

Figure 2 shows that none of the expectations were confirmed. Not only were predictions not significantly confirmed but there is no trend in that direction nor are the figures even marginly significant, nor, to use the last resort of the thesis writer with no results, "are the differences in the direction suggested by the hypothesis." It is obvious from the figure that there are no important differences in speed of individual reaction caused by the variations of composition of the three person group.

These lack of results seems surprising in the face of the American cultural norm of male help cited earlier. Also they seem to conflict with various other studies' findings that males do can assume

more responsibility and take more initiative than females in giving help to dependent others. Our rather tentative explanation for these apparent contradictions involves distinguishing between two classes of interventions in emergency situations: We call these two kinds direct and reportorial intervention. "Direct" intervention; such as stepping in and breaking up a fight, putting out a fire, or swimming out to save a drowning person, often requires skill, knowledge and physical strength. It may well involve danger. It is for these kinds of intervention that our cultural norms dictate male intervention.

The second way of dealing with an emergency is to report it to someone else that is qualified to handle it. Calling the police or sounding the fire alarm are examples of what we call "reportorial" intervention. For this kind of intervention there seems to be no clear norm requiring male action. Nor is any particular competence required. Anybody, female or male, medically trained or not, can go for help.

In the fit study, subjects clearly saw the required intervention as being reportorial in nature. Both, postexperimental interview data and subjects' verbal reports to the experimenter indicated that the subjects intended to report the emergency to the experimenter indicated that the subjects intended to report the emergency to the experimenter rather than go directly to the aid of the victim, whose exact location in any event, they did not know. So apparently, our manipulations of group composition rather missed the point. The important variable to manipulate rather than sex of the various bystanders or medical competence, was competence in reporting emergencies.

In this experimental situation this is a difficult manipulation to accomplish convincingly. However, we do have some evidence from a field experiment that show that variation in responsibility can be produced within a group of fixed size. To tell you about these results I need for you to follow me down to the dangerous subways of New York. Or, more accurately, I need for you to follow Harvey Allen down there since it is his thesis research that I am reporting now. A person is riding in a subway, a few others are present. A bewildered looking individual approaches and asks whether the subway is going uptown or downtown. Before an individual can answer another person in the vicinity cuts in an gives the <u>wrong</u> answer. If the subway is going upotown he replies "downtown" and vice versa. The dilemma for the first bystander is clear; shall he give the correct information, correcting the other bystander, or not?

Again, the situation was a prearranged one. Both the question asker and the misdirector were experimenters. The dependent measure of the study was whether the bystander corrected the misinformer. The independent variable of the study involves the direction in which the original request for information was asked. In one situation the subject would feel that the responsibility was directly his, in the second situation the responsibility was diffused over the group hearing the question, in the third situation the responsibility is focused on the future misinformer. This was accomplished quite simply: For the first situation the direction-asker aimed his question at the bystander. In the second situation he aimed it at both bystanders, and in the third directly at the misinformer. The results of this

The results of this variation in responsibility within a group of fixed composition are quite strong (figure 3). When the misinformer cuts across to give information in response to a question that is asked to the naive subject, the naive subject almost always corrects him and does so immediately, impatiently and indignantly. When, however, the original question was asked, not of the naive subjects, but simply toward the group of which he was a member, he corrects considerably less frequently. Finally, when the question is directed toward the other person he corrects least frequently of all.

From this we conclude that in a situation in which the intervention required is of a direct nature the variation in a way in which the situation develops can cause an individual to feel more or less responsibility for intervening when the size of the group remains the same.

To a person concerned with the humanitarian and ethical aspects of social behavior I would think that the results of these experiments are depressing. It is certainly possible to argue that our classification of our experimental manipulations under the heading of "diffusion of responsibility and blame" is an awkward or inapplicable one. But, however the experimental manipulations are classed or interpreted, it is clear that some of them produce significant reduction in helping behavior and this reduction must distress all of us who harbour the hope that people will at all times and in all ways help others in distress. I have no desire to end on such a distressing note. Luckily an experiment has recently been completed that I find encouraging. The experiment was done by my wife Susan and was a variation on the initial

experimental situation. Again we return to the seizure situation and again we return to the three person group. One victim and two others. This time however we modified the experimental equipment in order that two real subjects could participate. Drawing from the same subject pool as before we invited female college sophomores to come in for the experiment. Borrowing a method from my colleague Phil Zimbardo, we asked that they bring a friend to the experiment with them. The subjects were given reasons for this and the experiment continued as before. However, this time, unlike the other three person groups the two observers were actually acquainted with one another. The average speed of reporting the emergency condition for this group is shown in figure 4. Clearly it is considerably faster than the other three person groups and resembles the time of the two person group. This is not, I might stress, the average time of the fastest of the two subjects, it is the average of all individual subjects' response speeds, which is the most comparable to the others used.

We asked each pair of friends questions about their friendship. We asked which of the two was more often a leader and dominated various sorts of activities as well as questions about the length of their friendship and the conditions under which it was formed. The answers to these questions did not relate to which of the two subjects is more likely to respond or the speed of response as compared to the other pairs. Nor was there any tendency for the "host" subject - the one who brought the other subject to the experiment - to be the first to respond.

Again, our interpretation of this result would be in terms of diffusion of responsibility. In a cohesive group of acquaintances there

there is a short-circuiting of the processes that lead to the diffusion of responsibility in groups of strangers. It is possible that the short circuiting works through this mechanism: Each subject knows that he is accountable to his friend for his actions in a way that he is not to a stranger. Therefore, he acts quickly in an amergency in order to maintain his friend's good opinion of him.

This is probably too calculated an explanation for a process that happens rather swiftly without much coherent thought. If the subject's account of his experiences are correct, it may simply be that a group of two acquaintance feels themselves to be in a unit situation (a la Heider) and reacts quickly for that reason.

A last variation in acquaintance relationships remains to be explored. That is, of course, whether the naive subject was previously acquainted with the victim. It was our hunch that even the slightest acquaintance with the victim might make considerable difference in the subject's reaction to his plight. We tested this by arranging very brief "accidental" encounter between the naive subject and an experimental confederate posing as the future victim in the hall before the experimental place. The two met for about a minute, during which time the conferate was instructed to make conversation about topics having nothing to do with the experiment. At the end of this time the two were separated by the experimenter. This condition was run as a six person condition to give maximum scope for any possible increase in response speed. As a glance at figure four will show, increase in response speed did occur and is quite a substantial one.

With the subjects after the experiment we probed for the reasons for this. In all previous conditions we made a point of asking the

subject whether they were influenced to help or not to help by the knowledge that the other persons were also overhearing the emergency. We asked the question in every way we knew how: subtly, directly, tactfully, bluntly, and the answer was always that the subjects did not feel that their reactions had been affected by having other observers present although they were aware of the presence of these persons. This in the face of results showing the presence of others did affect helping responses. One might add that this has been quite a consistent result in other experiments we have done; subjects are either unaware of or unwilling to report the ways in which other persons' behavior or presence influences their own.

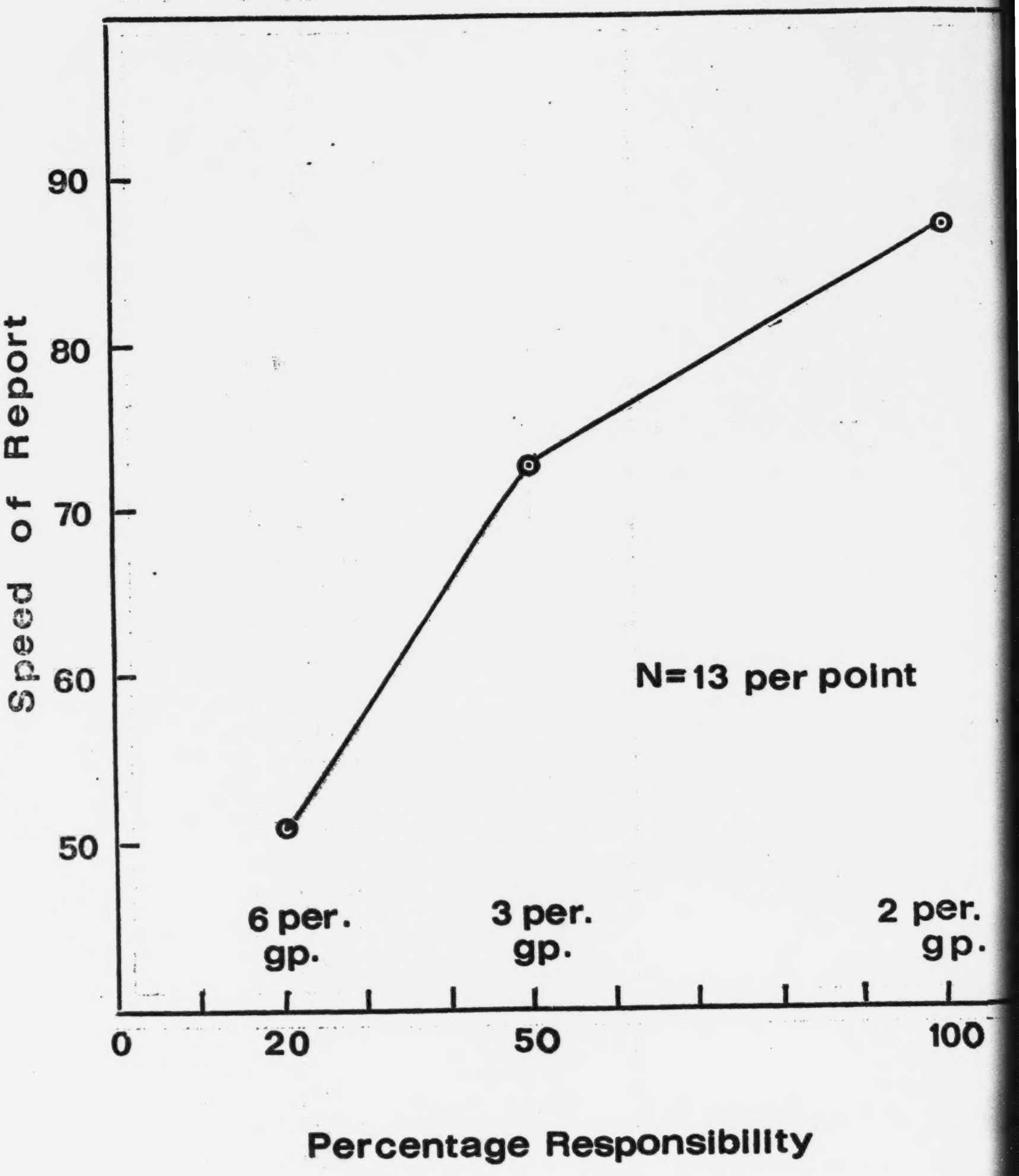
Persistently, but without a great deal of hope, we probed this final condition of subjects who had a brief encounter with the victim about whether they have been influenced by others present. Finally, the questions paid off. Subjects reported that they were influenced by the victim. They reported that the pictured him in a grip of the fit! Apparently, the ability to visualize the specific, concrete individual in distress, with whom one had had some human contact, increases the speed and likelihood with which an observer will help a victim in distress. This finding may suggest some of the psychological variables underlying the general and rather vague concept of urbanization.

In conclusion, let me elaborate this point.

It is our impression, and certainly the conviction of editorial writers, that the failure of bystanders to help in emergencies is a big city phenomenon. In so far as this is so, these experiments

suggest several reasons for it: When an emergency occurs in a large city: a crowd is likely to gather, the crowd members are likely to be strangers and, no one is likely to be acquainted with the victim.

These are exactly the conditions that made the helping response least likely in our experiments.


Speed of Report
90
80
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N=13 per point
6 per. gp.
3 per. gp.
2 per. gp.
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20
50
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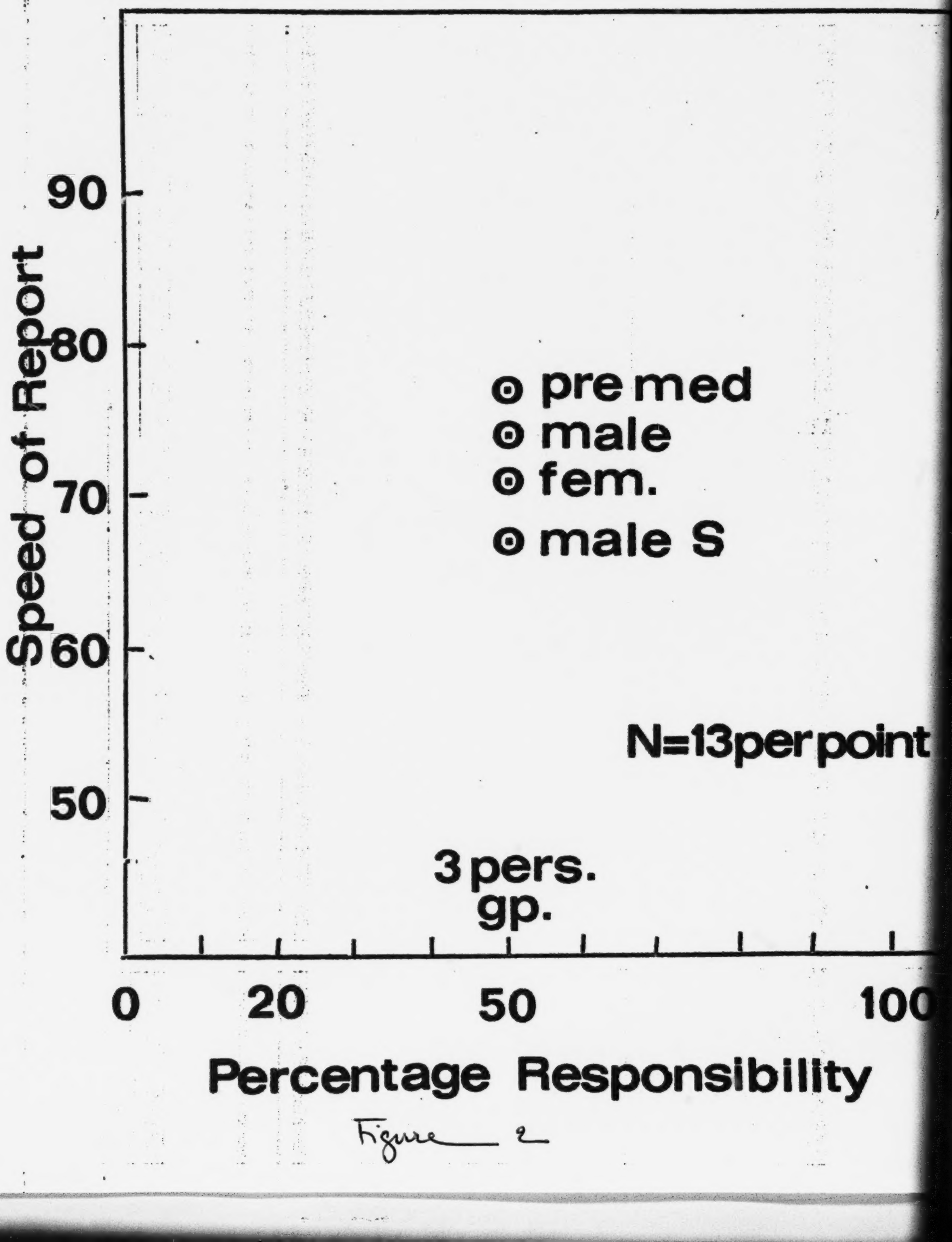
Percentage Responsibility

Figure 1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Percentage Responsibility

Figure 2

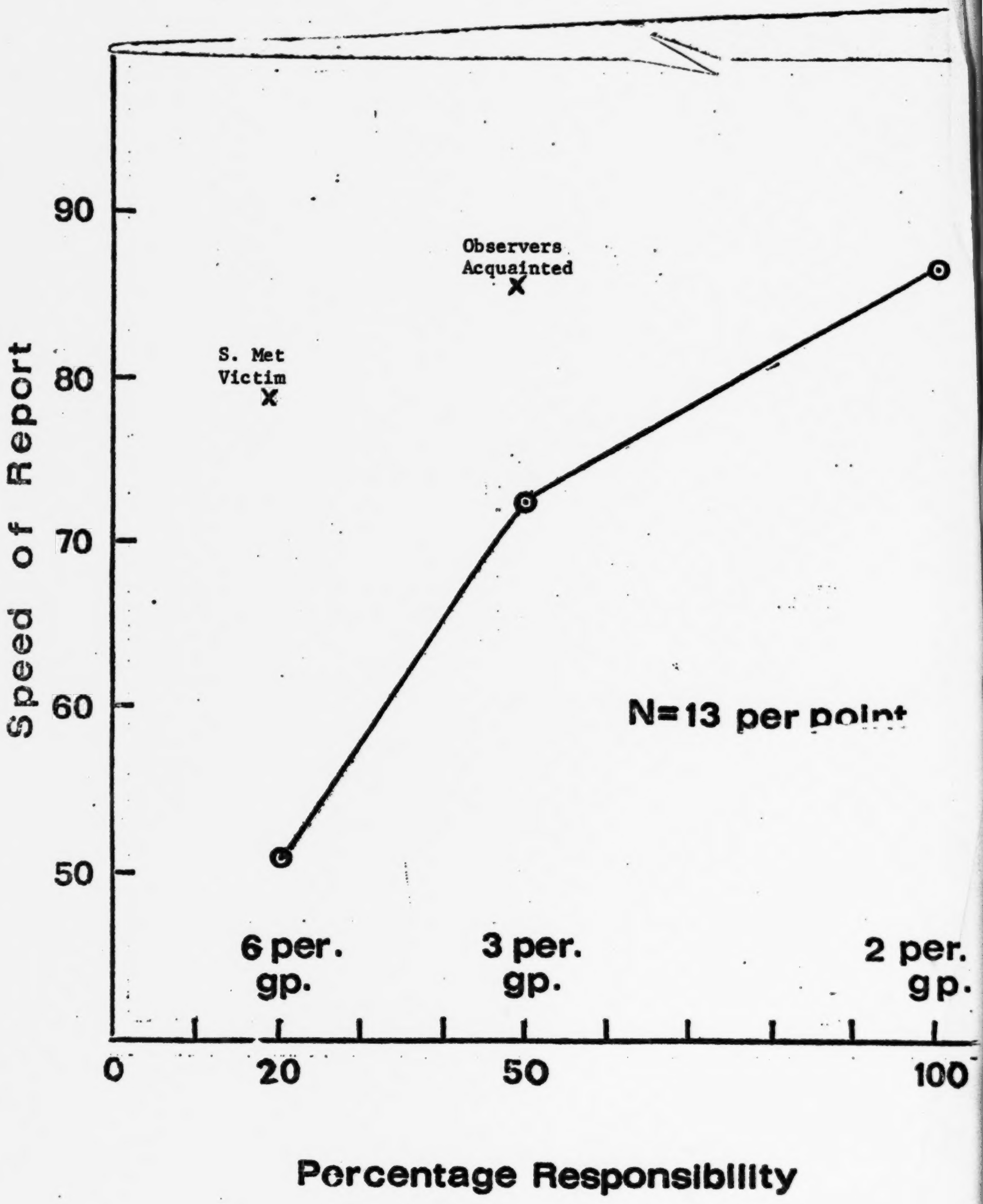
Speed of Report
90
80
70
60
50
Observers Acquainted
S. Met Victim
N=13 per point
6 per. gp.
3 per. gp.
2 per. gp.
0
20
50
100
Percentage Responsibility

FIGURE 3